



Jane Hamilton Hall: nuclear physics

March 27, 2017



June 30, 1970; Los Alamos, New Mexico

Driving east along New Mexico Highway 4, Dr. Jane Hamilton Hall descended between towering tuff mesas and crossed the murky Rio Grande. As she cruised through [San Ildefonso Pueblo](#), she glanced in her rearview mirror and saw the sun setting—spectacularly, as it always does in New Mexico—above the rugged peaks of the Jemez Mountains.

She tried to savor the streaks of red, orange, and yellow, knowing this was the last time she'd make this drive from [Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory](#) to her home on Circle Drive in Santa Fe. The 35-minute commute, filled with so many colors and expansive landscapes, had become a much-anticipated part of her day. But no more. As of 5 p.m., Jane had officially retired from her position of assistant director.

Jane thought back over her 25 years at the Laboratory. She had practically been a kid when she arrived there—only 30 years old, three years out of grad school, and recently

married to fellow physicist David B. Hall. She'd felt life's possibilities stretch out before her, bigger and brighter than the vast New Mexico sky.

Her enthusiasm was apparent, and she flourished in the Laboratory's physics and weapons divisions. "Education, career, and the latter-day duties of a wife and mother have cast no hue of sobriety on the personality of this young woman scientist," reported the *Los Alamos Times* in April 1947. "Thirty-one, she retains a youthful vivacity that shows itself in a frequent carefree smile and the impression she gives of abundant energy."



Jane sits with Nobel Prize-winning chemist and AEC Chairman Glenn Seaborg (far left) during his visit to Los Alamos in April 1961. Photo: Los Alamos Historical Society.

After 10 years of rising quickly through the ranks, Jane was tapped by the Laboratory director himself, Norris Bradbury, to be his right-hand woman. Assistant director was her formal title and one that she wore with pride, especially when she was the only woman in a room full of men—a frequent occurrence.

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